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ABSTRACT

The issue of credentialing and certification has become a major topic of discussion in America's community colleges. At the heart of this issue is the movement of private sector companies into areas previously viewed as the province of higher education: education and training, assessment of competencies, and the awarding of credentials that carry respect and value in the marketplace. This movement has led to competition between traditional education providers and newer adult certification centers. These white papers present a review of colloquia sponsored by two affiliated councils of AACC--the National Council on Occupation education (NCOE) and the National Council for Continuing Education and Training (NCCET). The papers argue that the rapid rise of the information technology industry has accelerated the demand for certification programs. Companies say they hope to hire an additional 900,000 workers, but of this total, 425,000 positions will go unfilled because of a lack of applicants with requisite skills. The papers define issues of immediacy and issues of long-range significance for AACC. Among the short-term issues is the need for continued regional and national meetings, and the need to work with the Department of Labor and the Department of Education to increase funding for efforts in credentialing and certification. (NB)

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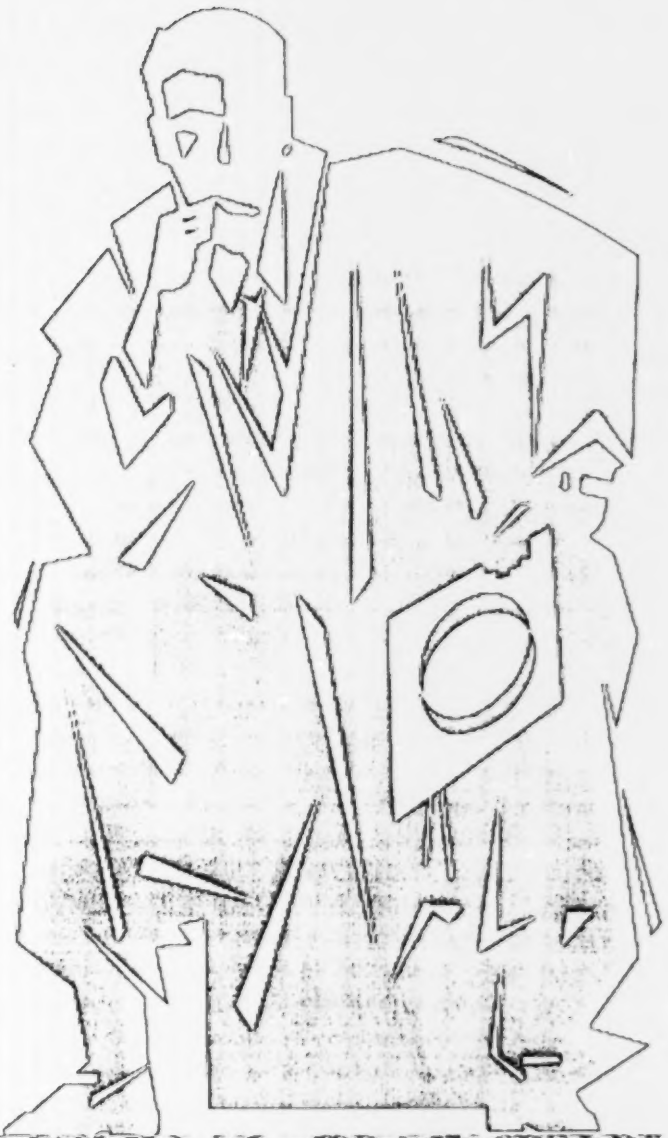
More Than A Matter of Degree – Credentialing, Certification and Community Colleges



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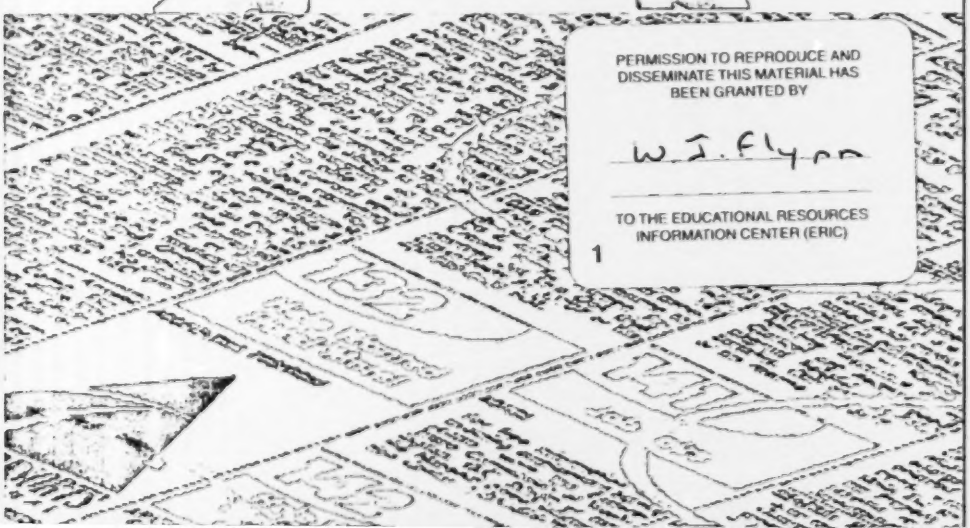

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Introduction

In the past two years, the issue of credentialing and certification has become a major item of discussion for America's community colleges. At the heart of the issue is a rapidly growing phenomenon in which private sector companies have moved into areas previously viewed as the province of higher education – education and training, assessment of competencies, and the awarding of credentials that carry respect and value in the marketplace. This, in turn, has led to competition between traditional education providers and newer adult certification centers. Needed dialogue between colleges and certification providers has been sporadic at best.

Response to this issue came in several ways. The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), in collaboration with the Education Testing Service (ETS), published "Help Wanted . . . Credentials Required: Community Colleges in the Knowledge Economy," an extensive work by two ETS researchers, Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers. The work examined the multiple roles community colleges play in credentialing, reviewed the emerging knowledge economy, analyzed the current dynamics of credentialing, and identified the challenges colleges face with a new breed of competitor.

Another response to this issue came from two affiliated Councils of AACC, who agreed to co-sponsor an invitational colloquium on the topic and its impact on community colleges. The Councils – the National Council on Occupational Education (NCOE) and the National Council for Continuing Education & Training (NCCET) - developed invitation lists and provided logistical support to planning committees composed of members of both Councils. NCOE hosted the first colloquium in Brainerd, Minnesota in July 2000. Patricia Carter, Executive Director of the Consortium for Community College Development, facilitated the first session and wrote the initial white paper. Following its publication, both groups agreed that further discussion was necessary and beneficial, given the magnitude of the issue and its implications for their respective memberships. NCCET hosted the second session in Scottsdale, Arizona in June 2001. William J. Flynn, Dean of Community Learning Resources at Palomar College in California, facilitated the second colloquium and wrote this paper.

The reader should note that the two white papers generated as a result of these meetings do not represent an official position or vision of NCCET, NCOE, AACC or their governing boards. The two colloquia produced active discussion, analysis and reflection among constituencies not often engaged in ongoing dialog. The two white papers were not research based, but rather reported what a cross section of participants from education, business and government expressed in free give-and-take exchanges. Not everyone will agree with some of the observations, opinions, conclusions and recommendations developed by the participants.

It is hoped that both documents will generate broad discussion, debate and ultimately, action on a local and national level.

What's At Stake?

The rapid rise of the Information Technology industry, with its need for highly skilled technicians, programmers and support personnel, has accelerated the demand for certification programs. In a recent study by the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA), the current national IT workforce is estimated at 10.4 million. This number does not include jobs in government, not-for-profit organizations or small entrepreneurial firms. Companies say they hope to hire an additional 900,000 workers this year. Of this total, 425,000 positions will go unfilled because of a lack of applicants with the requisite technical and non-technical skills.

The growth of the IT certification movement has been almost exponential, as chronicled in Clifford Adelman's compelling article, "A Parallel Universe – Certification in the Information Technology Guild" (Change, May/June, 2000). But this growth has been mostly in the private sector; community colleges have been slow to move into this arena. As a result, the need for a portable, market-driven credentialing system in community colleges has become increasingly acute. Some observers of higher education have even expressed the concern that industrial certification could eventually challenge traditional degree programs offered by accredited colleges and universities as the educational path of choice for discerning knowledge workers.

Part of the challenge for community colleges is to satisfy the increasing demand for credentialed education and training that falls outside the traditional college calendar and model for measuring completion. The process of satisfying these new demands for training can put a college in conflict with state and/or federal regulations as well as the criteria of regional accrediting bodies. Incumbent, transitional and entrepreneurial workers are ineligible for financial aid that will help them gain new skills and competencies, and thus advance in the workforce.

The First Colloquium – A Brief Review

The first colloquium was attended by 54 representatives of business, education, governmental agencies and other interested stakeholders, providing an opportunity for colleges, businesses and regulatory agencies to come together to promote cooperation and contribute to workforce development in an increasingly technological age. In the white paper developed by the colloquium facilitator, Patricia Carter, some basic questions were posed:

- Are the current difficulties experienced by community colleges in certification and credentialing issues symptomatic of a larger systemic problem?
- Do community colleges lack the flexibility and capacity to be responsive to the changing needs of the workplace?
- Can colleges harmonize the current conflicting demands of regional credentialing, state policy and rules, and accreditation and licensure requirements that work against streamlining processes?
- Should colleges revise their standards and documentation processes to address the reality that business and industry are becoming suspicious about college "graduates" given our inability to document measurable skills?

The paper went on to develop a series of key "issues statements" which displayed a reflective and, at times, critical view of how colleges are responding to the credentialing movement.

- Community colleges are not responding to needs, or performing at the level that stakeholders perceive that colleges need to in terms of credentials and certifications.
- Stakeholders want community college certification to have meaning.
- Community colleges have not communicated what they are doing in credentialing and certification in a lexicon that is understandable to stakeholders.
- The pace of change and the new workforce environment have exposed community colleges'

internal inertia and lack of attention to aligning curriculum with the needs of the community, shifting market forces, and demographic changes.

- Community colleges need to redesign credit and non-credit curricula, training programs, and learner support systems to be able to respond quickly to stakeholders' certification and credentialing requirements.
- Community colleges need to determine their role in establishing and adopting world-class standards for the work place in order to validate assessment of learning against those standards.
- The extent to which vendors can define standards, curriculum and assessment before compromising college regulatory control(s) and funding mechanisms needs to be determined.
- Community colleges need to develop a credentialing system that is valid, reliable, portable, flexible, and comprehensive

The Second Colloquium

The following year, more than 60 leaders in education, technology, government and business convened in June in Scottsdale, Arizona to participate in the second national colloquium on credentialing and certification, hosted by NCCET. Attendees came from a variety of sectors interested in this growing movement. Industry representatives were from Microsoft, Intel, I/Tech Services, Blackboard, Prometric, The Chauncey Group and PBS, among others. Governmental representatives came from the U. S. Departments of Labor and Education, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Skills Standards Board, and several state community college organizations. Other interested parties included representatives from CAEL (the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning), the National Video Communications Network, the Northwest Center for Emerging Technologies, the Sales and Services Voluntary Partnership, Jobs for the Future and the SCANS 2000 Commission. In addition to the two co-sponsoring Councils, representatives from the National Council of Instructional Administrators and the National Council on Student Development also participated.

AACC President George Boggs opened the session with observations on the future of community colleges and the importance of this topic, which is under serious discussion by the AACC Commission on Economic and Workforce Development.

Discussions related to policy development were focused around two basic questions asked of the attendees:

- What should community colleges be doing in the credentialing field?
- What initiatives should be developed on a national and local level that would help both colleges and industry certification providers?

Community Colleges and Credentialing - What's in It For Us?

While there may not be a strong body of empirical research indicating that certificates and credentials insure success or have made a meaningful contribution to workforce development, their increasing popularity and the growth of the industry cannot be denied. For those community colleges that have become involved in the movement, it can be said that credentialing and certification initiatives have benefited them in a number of ways. Scottsdale colloquium participants from the education sector were able to enumerate them easily.

The most immediate benefit is increased enrollment and income. Non-credit programs designed to prepare students for industry certifications often have long waiting lists, reflecting on the popularity of the programs and their fast-track mode. Colleges offering industry certification courses not tied to state subsidized tuition can often charge market rates, resulting in substantially increased - and welcomed - revenues.

A second benefit is the potential for new and enhanced partnerships. Internally, certification and/or credentialing initiatives can bring the credit

and non-credit sides of the college closer together to offer courses in a shared format, potentially creating a dialogue that could establish guidelines for awarding credit for noncredit instruction. More than ever before, students can easily move between noncredit credentialing courses and credit courses leading to more traditional certificates or degrees.

A third benefit is the way in which these initiatives encourage and enhance a college's partnerships with both industries and state agencies that promote certification, as well as with businesses and professional associations whose employees and members need training and retraining. Often, the college benefits from these new partnerships through grants, scholarships and equipment donated by the certifying industry or the local business community.

Less tangible, but no less valuable, is an enhanced perception of the college by the community. Successful completion of a certification exam carries with it less ambiguity about the capability of the learner and about what he/she has learned, than possession of a General Studies A.A. degree. Students perceive that they will earn more money in a career that requires certification or a credential. Colleges that offer industry certifications appear, to the general public and the business community, to be contemporary and leading edge.

Legislators, concerned with workforce development issues and limited funding capabilities, favor institutions that contribute to workforce strength and can be seen as self-supporting. Colleges that have well defined credentialing programs featuring solid learning assessment and outcomes measures can stand any accountability test. In the mind of many legislators (and it may be said, accrediting agencies as well), the success of a higher education institution is often measured in the number of degrees awarded, which puts community colleges in a comparatively weak position when matched against traditional four-year residential colleges. Having programs with a solid record of successful completers enhances the perception of institutional quality. Lastly, certificates and credentials are perceived as national or international in scope and content, and thus carry weight in a mobile and global society.

Moving Slowly – As Usual?

But nationally, community colleges have not embraced the credentialing and certification movement with any unanimity. While vocational programs often invite business participation in curriculum development or on advisory boards, other college segments are still hesitant to involve "outsiders" in any meaningful way. Resistance to blurring the lines between credit and noncredit, or combining both formats in credentialing is still strong. Most transcripting practices are still traditional and limited to credit activities. The Carnegie Unit, seat time as a measure of funding, and financial aid policies that disenfranchise the incumbent, transitional or entrepreneurial workforce are still the norm.

Faculty leadership on this topic is often prescribed by issues such as union concerns about workload, lack of interest from non-workforce related departments, and a sense of risk aversion common to academia in general. Cumbersome curriculum approval systems, both within the college and at the state level, leave the playing field to the corporate sector that is moving into the workforce training arena with authority and alacrity. Current faculty professional development funding is often inadequate to keep technology faculty up to speed in a fast-moving environment. And without transcripting of non-credit programs, or significant work done by institutional research offices in non-credit areas, documentation of the validity and effectiveness of college credentialing and certification programs is difficult.

Business and Higher Education - Two Different Worlds?

It could be said that the rapid movement of the corporate sector into credentialing and certification can be traced to a vast difference between corporate and college cultures. Higher education tends to be tradition-bound, cautious in decision making, insulated from the "real world," heavily subsidized, uncontested (at least until recently), seasonal, and averse to risk. In the cor-

porate world, conditions change rapidly, the environment is highly competitive and uncertain, operations are increasingly 24/7, and the entrepreneur is rewarded. When IT companies wanted to assure conformance to their own standards in the workforce, is it any wonder that they will frequently turn to their corporate cousins or their own training departments to get the job done?

One of the significant byproducts of the Scottsdale colloquium was the amount of candor with which corporate representatives discussed their experiences with community colleges. Discussion on a perceived "communication gap" between businesses and community colleges revealed a basic misunderstanding of what each party understands a partnership to be. Often, colleges view corporations as being neighbors, sponsors or donors, expecting a partnership to be the lending of the business name to validate a program, provision of money or equipment to support a project, or simply a customer-supplier relationship. Less often, colleges actively seek corporate input into curricular, programming or academic issues.

Businesses, on the other hand, expect to be involved in a joint venture in which the parties share both risk and decision-making. From their perspective, colleges seem to function without the benefit of a business plan. Of principal concern was the inability of colleges to deliver "metrics," deliverables that are tangible and confirm the validity of any proposed partnership. One corporate participant even questioned whether colleges know what business they are in, saying that colleges believe they are in the "degree business," when in reality, the majority of our student population is not interested in pursuing or attaining this product. What colleges are really in, he said, is the "course business."

Why this perception from the private sector that we don't know what business we are in? Is the associate degree as much of a sought-after credential as colleges would like it to be? A look at some of the statistics on the AACC web site is instructive. America's community colleges grant an impressive 450,000 associate degrees annually, but when that number is compared to the total annual enrollment in community colleges (10.4 million learners), the percentage of annual graduates is 4.3% of that total annual enrollment. Approximately 200,000 more students opt for a certificate rather than an AA. Add to these numbers another statistic - 28% of all community college enrollees already have a degree - and one begins to see how complicated it can be to serve a diverse population (age, gender, background, preparation) whose educational goals are highly individualized and unique. Could it be that colleges are in the degree, certificate *and* course business?

How Do We Measure Up?

In one breakout session, college representatives frankly asked for feedback on community colleges and their forays into credentialing. In return, they received an interesting rhetorical question from one corporate representative:

"When I walk onto the campus of a community college as a representative of the corporate sector, how do I know this college will meet my needs and be a successful partner?"

This question prompted representatives of the corporate sector to spontaneously develop a list of indicators reflecting the type of college they sought as a true business partner. Their criteria included the following:

1. The college already knows its local market and has already developed programs for and with their community.
2. The college understands and implements outcome measures and has already tracked information about community participants.
3. There is data available to support the academic progress of the students and the success of the programs they have developed with the local business community.
4. A quality relationship between the college and the corporate sector is a priority of the top college leadership.

5. The staff at the college are responsive – they return phone calls, email, and understand "customer service."

6. The college makes internal processes work invisibly to the corporate sector – specifically, there are no hassles. If there are issues with creating a course, or processing applications, or anything else unique to the college, it is handled internally and professionally. That's what the college side of the partnership means - handling their own business.

7. The college staff can make decisions – and then implement the decisions, as opposed to claiming that they must go back to campus and "convince" certain constituencies.

8. There is a viable supply chain for content and instructors.

9. There is a "positive vision" with forward thinking, committed leadership and considerable presidential involvement.

10. The college knows how to implement the process from start to finish, and wants repeat business.

What Else Does Business Want?

In addition to a solid business partner, business wants something else from community colleges – a product: a well trained and educated worker. Just as important as industry-specific training, business wants certification that a person has basic work skills (the ability to read, write, compute, use a computer, work as a team member, use critical thinking, be ready and able to work). This type of certification, whether it is called The New Age Basic Skills or Basic Skills for the New Economy, is seen as a void that corporations look to community colleges to fill.

To have impact, standards for this type of credential could be developed as a national certificate, perhaps encouraged and promoted by AACC, and made available to every community college in the nation to offer. At last, community colleges would have a certification universally needed by employers.

Criteria For A New Order

Another question raised by representatives from government and regulatory agencies was this: why don't community colleges align themselves more vigorously with national initiatives designed to enhance workforce development, such as the work done by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) and the National Skills Standards Board? There was general consensus that the national skills standards provide a useful set of tools and a framework for formulating new criteria for development of certification or credentialing systems. Echoing discussions held at the first colloquium in Minnesota, there was agreement, that to be effective, certification and/or credentialing processes or systems should have the following characteristics:

- The system must be portable – in order to meet the needs of an increasingly mobile workforce.
- The system must be modular - in order to be focused on discrete and defined competencies, assessment methods and learning strategies that will establish, demonstrate and/or validate mastery.
- The system must be based on competencies and outcomes – in many cases college level courses are created with the presumption that competencies are embedded within them. Instead, the process needs to be re-engineered so that curriculum development starts with the identification of competencies and subsequently establishes the learning strategies to master the competencies.
- The system must be recognized by professional and industry associations – ideally, industry and professional associations should play a more active role in the certification/credentialing process in partnership with colleges.
- The system must contain mechanisms for constant updating – colleges need to routinely monitor external changes that impact curriculum and have the capability to quickly update content through an efficient and effective process.

- The system must have mechanisms to acknowledge and accommodate prior learning – the system needs to recognize that learners can have prior learning experiences that can be documented, authenticated, and validated.
- The system must avoid a "guild" mentality where narrow vested industry interests dominate – the system needs industry and corporate involvement but must avoid being controlled by those sectors.
- The system must recognize the separate functions of instruction and assessment – the system needs to have role clarity about assessment and instruction, and recognize that an independent third party assessment/validation process will add value to certification and credentialing programs.

One Approach To Credential Design

Based on these criteria, participants developed a four-step process that community colleges should use to re-engineer their current systems to reflect the following order or sequencing of activities/processes when designing certification/credential systems:

Step # 1: Use the national skills standards for occupational clusters to frame the outcome or competencies to be mastered; these standards reflect the competencies of the successful practitioner.

Step # 2: Partner with industry and assessment organizations to develop and deploy, for national use, assessment tools that can measure and validate mastery of competencies at different levels of performance, and be specifically calibrated to the national skills standards. In this scenario, the assessment process is understood to be a third-party system that operates independently and validates the assessment of competencies. Ideally, learners needing guidance would be able to take a diagnostic assessment to identify current levels of performance and competency gaps.

Step # 3: Design learning strategies that empower learners to successfully master the identified competencies and successfully demonstrate mastery through the assessment process.

Step # 4: Through an evaluation of the assessment process, all partners determine the extent to which the learning strategies are effective by tracking how/where learners master the competencies and provide feedback to all concerned partners - learners, industry, and instructional providers.

This new approach is seen as almost diametrically opposed to current practices in higher education, where the emphasis is on teaching and individual course assessment is usually not "normed" to any standards. The proposed system empowers and encourages the development of a wide variety of learning strategies that are learner-centered. These strategies would not be defined in terms of "seat time," and they could be designated either credit or non-credit. However, they would be evaluated and receive funding incentives based on results, more specifically, on their ability to prepare learners to master stated competencies in an efficient and effective method - recognizing that strategies will need to reflect learning style differences and learner circumstances.

What Are The Barriers for Colleges?

There were four principal responses to this question. By far, the largest response dealt with the inequity of funding credit programs at a higher level than non-credit programs. The constant refrain was "fund credit and non-credit equally." There are compelling circumstances behind this request. Industry certification programs are popular with the general public because they are not tied to the "credit apparatus" within which community colleges operate. Semester length courses, the academic calendar, seat-time funding and academic credit are the building blocks of our institutions. The entire corporate credentialing and certification movement is almost the opposite of the credit paradigm. Adults in our communities want a new relationship with their local college, one that is mutually beneficial and ongoing. Yet we marginalize the lifelong learner on

our campus because he or she does not want or need what is still our principal offering – credit.

Most often, non-credit programs on campus must compete with credit programs for precious institutional resources. Of necessity, non-credit offerings must be flexible, customized and accessible, offered in variable time frames and formats, all while working on the fringe of their institution's priorities, facilities and support. Giving funding parity to these programs would greatly increase offerings to the community while providing enhanced workforce development opportunities.

The second concern: financial aid programs ignore the part-time student or the student that seeks "credit-free" learning or training. Financial aid funding only for the emerging workforce ignores the other segments of the workforce equally in need of assistance and support. The entrepreneurial, incumbent and transitional workforce is denied the opportunity to upgrade skills, secure training to alleviate unemployment or strengthen the capabilities of the small business. Changes in financial aid legislation are needed to ensure access for learners in non-traditionally structured training programs that offer quick response to emerging training needs.

A third barrier dealt with accountability and institutional effectiveness issues. It was strongly felt that alternative criteria are needed to evaluate whether or not a community college is being responsive to its community in workforce development and continuing education initiatives. The present measures of success used by many accreditation and governmental agencies generally rely on graduation rates, number of completers and transfer rates. They do little to document competence, and do not reflect a "real world" view of why adults go or return to their local community college. Accreditation agencies must be involved in a dialogue on how to effectively assess credentialing and certification programs offered by colleges, using measurements different than those used to evaluate traditional degree programs.

State funding patterns are a fourth issue of concern. States that fund credit and non-credit programs equally seem to have a more sophisticated approach to the totality of workforce development strategies, recognizing that learning and training come in many forms and guises. Most states do not fund non-credit programs for many reasons, including the assumption that the state's responsibility is to support the education of its citizens only once. This preferential funding pattern drives the priorities of our colleges, creating a pavlovian response from administrators eager to maximize revenue. Even schools that have undertaken Microsoft's MCSE program or Cisco's Academy approach have tried to shoehorn the offerings into a credit mode to match funding patterns. What's lost in the shuffle are some basic questions – what does the learner want, and when and how does the learner want it?

Other recommended initiatives to overcome current obstacles included:

- Seek funding for increased incumbent worker training currently not supported by employers;
- Develop tax credit legislation for companies that offer work experience opportunities for faculty and students;
- Develop a national, portable credential offered and accepted by community colleges nationwide;
- Develop industry-based (national or local) standards that would be a core component of college-offered certification programs.

What Should Community Colleges Be Doing In The Credentialing Field?

A significant amount of the time spent in the colloquium was dedicated to developing recommendations to assist community colleges in their efforts to become "players" in the certification and credentialing field. Listed below are specific recommendations for colleges on a local and national level, plus recommendations for AACC that require immediate attention as well as those that require ongoing monitoring and advocacy.

Recommendations for Community Colleges – Local Level

- Encourage outcomes-based curriculum development, assisted by industry representatives, centered on core competencies needed in that particular industry. Additionally, develop vendor-neutral programs, certificates and credentials that convey foundational skills transferable across professions plus a love for lifelong learning.
- Make external scanning a regular function of institutional research efforts, and integrate it into college strategic planning. Utilize the non-credit, contract training and community services components of the college as an unofficial R&D department.
- Develop a "strategic delivery team," free from internal restraints and politics, that can be the point of contact for the local corporate community, responding quickly to local training demands. Develop a business plan for the team and incorporate local business and industry personnel as advisors and advocates in the community.
- Break down the self-imposed barriers between credit and non-credit offerings, providing a level playing field for all college offerings and maximizing learning opportunities in a variety of formats. Offer credentialing and certificates in both credit and non-credit formats to promote portability. Identify ways for non-credit credentials to be easily articulated into the credit programs so that non-credit students can easily attain degrees at a later date.
- Re-examine current investment in professional development of full time and part time credit and non-credit faculty and staff. More emphasis should be on programs that advance staff skills in the validation of knowledge & competencies.
- Design and teach outcomes-based curricula, with multiple entry and exit points, that prepare graduates (whether they be recipients of degrees, diplomas or certificates) to meet the requirements for credentialing. Expand methods of demonstration of competency to include tests, portfolios, internships, co-op education, service learning, prior industry experience, etc.
- Integrate vendor specific credentials into appropriate curricula, and offer them in both credit & non-credit formats so students can choose degree or immediate employment options.
- Restructure technical curriculum around measurable competencies and their assessment, and develop national certifications, offered by a network of community colleges, that lead to industry recognized credentials.
- Actively include all interested stakeholders, including industry and community representatives, in the planning and ongoing evaluation of curriculum standards, which should be outcomes based and research defensible.
- Focus on core/foundational competencies that cut across multiple industries. Develop a national "New Economy Basic Skills" certificate that will provide incumbent & dislocated workers a credible skills "refresher program" that includes computer skills, math, reading, writing, customer service and communications skills.
- Make transcripting universal, not restricted to credit students. Better tracking of non-credit students - both in recruitment and in program completion – can document institutional effectiveness.

Recommendations for Community Colleges – National Level

- Community colleges should acknowledge, not ignore, the growing privatization of education, and must monitor current developments in credentialing and certification that may impact their effectiveness on the local level.
- Community colleges should develop knowledge of, and contact with, national professional organizations that recommend performance outcomes in specific fields, in order to

help local industries comply with national standards while customizing qualifications for the needs of the local workforce.

- Community Colleges should recognize non-credit lifelong learners as a significant part of the national workforce and make them feel welcome on campus.
- Community colleges should realize that, from an international perspective, their students are entering a global market. If community colleges are to work internationally they need to ensure their credentialing system can be translated internationally. Initiatives to establish international competency standards, recognized by colleges globally, are needed.
- Community colleges should replace the current transcript system with a knowledge management system that recognizes competency and includes formal and informal learning, and insure that any new system documents an individual's knowledge, skills, experiences, prior certifications and abilities.
- Community colleges should adapt new mechanisms to assist student and adult learners, such as the ALX career management account.

What AACC Can Do To Help Community Colleges

Recognizing that the American Association of Community Colleges is the primary advocacy organization for the nation's community colleges, many of the recommendations developed in Scottsdale have direct and immediate resonance for the AACC leadership. These recommendations are divided into two sections – those that have a sense of urgency and immediacy, and those that require ongoing monitoring and advocacy on behalf of community colleges.

Issues of Immediacy for AACC

- AACC should convene a national forum to develop and disseminate best practices in college credentialing, and should utilize its affiliated Councils to identify model programs for replication.
- AACC should work with other national educational organizations to advocate a unit of measurement other than the Carnegie unit-based measurement that drives scheduling, curriculum and funding.
- AACC should convene meetings, both on a regional and national basis, with representatives of the corporate credentialing community. AACC should work with these corporations in developing a united advocacy effort to bring about changes in federal and state legislation that prevent community colleges from responding in a timely and effective manner.
- AACC should actively lobby to modify financial aid requirements so that learners can use financial aid to access credit and non-credit credential and certificate programs.
- AACC should work with the Department of Labor and Department of Education to increase discussion about, and funding for community college efforts in credentialing and certification

Issues of Long Range Significance for AACC

- AACC should embrace the ongoing role of convener for local, regional & national meetings to bring together stakeholders to explore key issues, outline strategies for influencing national policy, define elements for effective transportability of skills across jobs, and recommend broad standards at the national level.
- AACC should work with the National Center for Educational Statistics to enhance data collection from non-degree granting institutions & acquire more data on certificates and credentials issued, in order to better inform policy research.
- AACC should lobby the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to work with regional accrediting associations to include certification and credentialing as a part of their evaluation process.
- AACC should lead a national dialogue to establish alternatives to present measures of success that

now rely on graduation or transfer as a satisfactory measure of institutional accomplishment.

- AACC should act as liaison between national professional organizations that recommend performance outcomes in specific fields, and local industries in order to comply with national standards while customizing qualifications for the needs of local industries.
- AACC should develop a campaign to have community colleges nationally recognized as the preferred site for aggregating transcripts and documenting work-related experience.

Closing Thoughts

Credentialing is much more than a "topic du jour" for America's community colleges. Identifying this movement as deserving only one year of focused attention is shortsighted – it should have a longer shelf life in the attention span of AACC and its member colleges. Should the new generation of technologically savvy youngsters choose the fast track, potentially lucrative programs offered by the private sector as their preferred workforce preparation, the ultimate result might be the devaluation of the one credential unique to community colleges – the Associate Degree.

If our college leaders are the stewards of their institutions and the designers of their future, their vision must extend beyond the limitations they often impose upon themselves. It is true that college faculty, administration and staff are working within an architecture and infrastructure not easily suited to rapid realignment or redeployment of resources to address new opportunities. Credentialing is perhaps the latest contemporary challenge – or opportunity – for our colleges, and it may be the triggering event we need, one that gives us permission to question our processes and programs, our political timidity, and yes, even our mission. It is an opportunity we can squander, but only at our peril. We must not mistake the edge of the rut for the horizon.

About the Councils

The National Council for Occupational Education is a private, nonprofit, professional organization committed to promoting excellence and growth in occupational education at the postsecondary level. NCOE provides a national forum for administrators and faculty in occupational, vocational, technical, and career education as well as representatives of business, labor, military, and government, to affect and direct the future role of two-year colleges in work-related education.

As the oldest affiliate Council of the American Association of Community Colleges, the **National Council for Continuing Education & Training**, provides leadership for continuing education, workforce development, community services and distance learning professionals, connecting peers in the profession to each other through innovative quality programs and services that help its members respond to the education and training needs of their communities.

About the Author

William J. Flynn has compiled 33 years experience working as faculty and administrator in community colleges in Maryland, New Jersey, Arizona, Ohio and California. He recently retired after 12 years of service at Palomar College in San Marcos, California where he was Dean of the Division of Community Learning Resources.

For the National Council for Continuing Education and Training (NCCET), he has served as State Liaison, Regional Director on the NCCET Board, National Conference Director and Publications Editor. He is in his sixth year as editor of The Catalyst, the Journal of the Council. In 1998, the Council gave Mr. Flynn its National Award for Exemplary Leadership. In July 2001, he became the Managing Director of NCCET.

Recent publications include the White Paper on Teaching and Learning for the American Association of Community Colleges' New Expeditions Project, and several articles in the Community College Journal: "Rethinking Teaching and Learning" (1999), "This Old House" (2000), and "Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due" (2001). He also chaired the annual North American Conference on the Learning Paradigm, which was held in San Diego for the past five years.

Other NCCET Abstracts

Strategically Positioning Your College To Meet The Workforce Development Challenge

Leveling the Playing Field Through A Commitment to Learning

Funding For Non-credit Lifelong Learning: A National Priority for Community Colleges

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Join the Future

As the oldest affiliate Council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the National Council for Continuing Education & Training is the premiere association serving professionals in America's community colleges. The Council is committed to providing its members with benefits that keep them up to date on new trends, help maintain a personal and professional network, and give access to the latest leading edge programs throughout the country.

The NCCET leadership is active on the national scene, working with AACC Commissions, such as the Commissions on Economic and Workforce Development, and Learning and Communications Technologies. NCCET has actively been contributing to national policy development thorough our sponsorship of national colloquia on credentialing and certification, and our authorship of this 2001 White Paper on this important topic.

Membership in the Council is open to individuals working in the fields of community services programming, continuing education, distance learning and/or workforce training in colleges and universities. Annual dues include the services and benefits of the Council, voting and office-holding rights and privileges, NCCET publications and access to the Council's award-winning web site, where you can post your class schedule, job positions or share information with colleagues throughout the country.

Annual dues for an Individual Membership are $50.00. Institutional membership, which provides membership for five persons within a single college or university, is $200.00. It's easy to become a member. Log on to www. nccet. org, go to Membership Resources, and complete the online membership registration form. The Council will invoice you for your membership fee.

Join the Future. Join NCCET.

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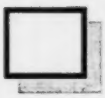

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